

**Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, DC 20554**

In re Application of)	
)	
Mt. Vernon Missionary Baptist Church)	Facility ID No. 126713
)	NAL/Acct. No. MB-202141410046
For Renewal of License for)	FRN: 0009672072
Station WNNN-LP)	File No. 0000113216
Noxapater, Mississippi)	

**MEMORANDUM OPINION AND ORDER
AND
NOTICE OF APPARENT LIABILITY FOR FORFEITURE**

Adopted: September 3, 2021

Released: September 7, 2021

By the Chief, Audio Division, Media Bureau:

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Media Bureau (Bureau) has before it the application (Application)¹ of Mt. Vernon Missionary Baptist Church (Licensee) for renewal of license for low-power FM (LPFM) station WNNN-LP, Noxapater, Mississippi (Station). In this *Memorandum Opinion and Order and Notice of Apparent Liability for Forfeiture (NAL)*,² we find that the Licensee apparently willfully violated section 73.3539 of the Rules³ by failing to timely file a license renewal application for the Station. Based upon our review of the facts and circumstances before us, we conclude that the Licensee is apparently liable for a monetary forfeiture in the amount of one thousand five hundred dollars (\$1,500).

II. BACKGROUND

2. Section 73.3539(a) of the Rules requires that applications for renewal of license for broadcast stations must be filed “not later than the first day of the fourth full calendar month prior to the expiration date of the license sought to be renewed.”⁴ An application for renewal of the Station’s license should have been filed by February 3, 2020, four months prior to the Station’s license expiration date of June 1, 2020.⁵ The Application was not filed until May 5, 2020. The Licensee requests a waiver of the filing deadline.⁶ The Licensee explains that it was expecting a reminder notice of the renewal application filing deadline from the Commission but that the Licensee never received one due to a changed email address.⁷ The Licensee claims that it filed the Application “immediately” after it became aware that the

¹ Application File No. 0000113216 (filed May 5, 2020).

² This NAL is issued pursuant to sections 309(k) and 503(b) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended (Act), and section 1.80 of the Commission’s rules (Rules). See 47 U.S.C. §§ 309(k), 503(b); 47 CFR § 1.80. The Bureau has delegated authority to issue the NAL under section 0.283 of the Commission’s rules. See 47 CFR § 0.283.

³ See 47 CFR § 73.3539.

⁴ 47 CFR § 73.3539(a). This provision applies to LPFM stations, including Licensee’s station, by virtue of section 73.801 of the Rules. 47 CFR § 73.801.

⁵ See 47 CFR §§ 73.1020, 73.3539(a).

⁶ Application, Attachment, Waiver Request for Late Filed Renewal Application.

⁷ *Id.*

renewal filing date had passed and before the Station's license expiration date.⁸

III. DISCUSSION

3. *Proposed Forfeiture.* This *NAL* is issued pursuant to section 503(b)(1)(B) of the Act. Under that provision, a person who is found to have willfully or repeatedly failed to comply with any provision of the Act or any rule, regulation, or order issued by the Commission shall be liable to the United States for a forfeiture penalty.⁹ Section 312(f)(1) of the Act defines willful as "the conscious and deliberate commission or omission of [any] act, irrespective of any intent to violate" the law.¹⁰ The legislative history to section 312(f)(1) of the Act clarifies that this definition of willful applies to both sections 312 and 503(b) of the Act,¹¹ and the Commission has so interpreted the term in the section 503(b) context.¹²

4. The Commission has held that in the case of late-filed license renewal applications, the Bureau may waive section 73.3539(a) for the limited purpose of accepting and acting on the station's license renewal application, and issue a notice of apparent liability for the violation of section 73.3539(a).¹³ Accordingly, we grant Licensee's waiver request to the extent necessary to accept the untimely Application. However, we find that issuing a notice of apparent liability is still appropriate here. The Commission has held that violations resulting from inadvertent error or failure to become familiar with the Commission's requirements are willful violations.¹⁴ Moreover, correspondence reminding a licensee that a renewal deadline is approaching is a mere courtesy and does not in any way change the licensee's obligation to file a renewal application before the deadline.¹⁵ "Long-standing Commission precedent . . . states that responsibility for complying with terms of a station's license rests solely and exclusively with the licensee."¹⁶ Licensee was ultimately responsible for ensuring that it complied with the Rules by filing a timely renewal application. It did not do so.

5. The Commission's *Forfeiture Policy Statement* and section 1.80(b)(10) of the Rules

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ 47 U.S.C. § 503(b)(1)(B). *See also* 47 CFR § 1.80(a)(1).

¹⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 312(f)(1).

¹¹ *See* H.R. Rep. No. 97-765, 97th Cong. 2d Sess. 51 (1982).

¹² *See Southern California Broad. Co.*, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 6 FCC Rcd 4387, 4388, para. 5 (1991), *recon. denied*, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 7 FCC Rcd 3454 (1992).

¹³ *Discussion Radio Incorporated*, Memorandum Opinion and Order and Notice of Apparent Liability for Forfeiture, 19 FCC Rcd 7433, 7437, paras. 13-15 (2004) ("de facto" waiver granted to accept untimely license renewal application and licensee sanctioned for untimely filing); *see also Atlantic City Board of Education*, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 31 FCC Rcd 9380, 9385 n.32 (2016) (a waiver request is not necessary for the Bureau to act on an untimely filed license renewal application).

¹⁴ *Whidbey Island Center for the Arts*, Forfeiture Order, 25 FCC Rcd 8204 (MB 2010) (*Whidbey Island Forfeiture Order*) (citing *PJB Communications of Virginia, Inc.*, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 7 FCC Rcd 2088 (1992); *Southern California Broadcasting Co.*, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 6 FCC Rcd 4387, 4387 (1991), *recon. denied*, 7 FCC Rcd 3454 (1992) (stating that "inadvertence . . . is at best, ignorance of the law, which the Commission does not consider a mitigating circumstance"); *Standard Communications Corp.*, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 1 FCC Rcd 358 (1986) (stating that "employee acts or omissions, such as clerical errors in failing to file required forms, do not excuse violations"))).

¹⁵ *See Christian Radio Translator Association/Salmon, Inc.*, Forfeiture Order, 24 FCC Rcd 11288, 11289 (MB 2009) (holding that a Licensee's mistaken assumption that it would receive a reminder of the filing date from the Commission did not excuse the failure to file a timely renewal application).

¹⁶ *Escalante City*, Forfeiture Order, 26 FCC Rcd 5961, 5962 (MB 2011); *see also Southern Broadcasting & Investment Co., Inc.*, Memorandum Opinion and Order and Notice of Apparent Liability, 25 FCC Rcd 13199, 13200 (MB 2010) ("Licensees are obligated to comply fully with the Rules, including filing a timely renewal application and maintaining in effect the station's authorization").

establish a base forfeiture amount of \$3,000 for the failure to file a required form.¹⁷ In determining the appropriate forfeiture amount, we may adjust the base amount upward or downward by considering the factors enumerated in section 503(b)(2)(E) of the Act, including “the nature, circumstances, extent and gravity of the violation, and, with respect to the violator, the degree of culpability, any history of prior offenses, ability to pay, and such other matters as justice may require.”¹⁸

6. In this case, the Licensee failed to file a timely renewal application for the Station. The Licensee’s explanation that it did not receive a reminder notice from the Commission does not excuse its inaction. However, the Licensee did file the Application prior to the expiration of the Station’s license. Taking into consideration all of the factors required by section 503(b)(2)(E) of the Act and the *Forfeiture Policy Statement*, we will reduce the forfeiture from the base amount to \$1,500 for the failure to file a timely license renewal application because, as an LPFM station, the Station is providing a secondary service.¹⁹

7. *License Renewal Application.* In evaluating an application for license renewal, the Commission’s decision is governed by section 309(k) of the Act.²⁰ That section provides that if, upon consideration of the application and pleadings, we find that: (1) the station has served the public interest, convenience, and necessity; (2) there have been no serious violations of the Act or the Rules; and (3) there have been no other violations which, taken together, constitute a pattern of abuse, we are to grant the renewal application.²¹ If, however, the licensee fails to meet that standard, the Commission may deny the application – after notice and opportunity for a hearing under section 309(e) of the Act – or grant the application “on terms and conditions that are appropriate, including a renewal for a term less than the maximum otherwise permitted.”²²

8. We find that the Licensee’s apparent violation of section 73.3539 of the Rules does not present “serious violations” warranting designation for evidentiary hearing. Moreover, we find no evidence of violations that, when considered together, constitute a pattern of abuse.²³ Further, based on our review of the Application, we find that the Station served the public interest, convenience, and necessity during the subject license term. We will therefore grant the Application by separate action upon the conclusion of this forfeiture proceeding if there are no issues other than the apparent violation that would preclude grant of the Application.

IV. ORDERING CLAUSES

9. Accordingly, **IT IS ORDERED**, pursuant to section 503(b) of the Communications Act

¹⁷ See *Forfeiture Policy Statement and Amendment of Section 1.80(b) of the Rules to Incorporate the Forfeiture Guidelines*, Report and Order, 12 FCC Rcd 17087, 17113-15 (1997) (*Forfeiture Policy Statement*), *recon. denied*, 15 FCC Rcd 303 (1999); 47 CFR § 1.80(b)(10), table 1 to paragraph (b)(10).

¹⁸ 47 U.S.C. § 503(b)(2)(E); see also *Forfeiture Policy Statement*, 12 FCC Rcd at 17100; 47 CFR § 1.80(b)(10).

¹⁹ See, e.g., *Virginia Center for Public Press*, Memorandum Opinion and Order and Notice of Apparent Liability, 34 FCC Rcd 9312 (MB 2019) (proposing \$1,500 forfeiture for untimely filed renewal application for LPFM station).

²⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 309(k).

²¹ 47 U.S.C. § 309(k)(1).

²² 47 U.S.C. §§ 309(k)(2), 309(k)(3).

²³ For example, we do not find here that the Licensee’s operation of the Station “was conducted in an exceedingly careless, inept and negligent manner and that the licensee is either incapable of correcting or unwilling to correct the operating deficiencies.” See *Heart of the Black Hills Stations*, Decision, 32 FCC 2d 196, 198, para. 6 (1971). Nor do we find on the record here that “the number, nature and extent” of the violations indicate that “the licensee cannot be relied upon to operate [the station] in the future in accordance with the requirements of its licenses and the Commission’s Rules.” *Id.* at 200, para. 11. See also *Center for Study and Application of Black Econ. Dev.*, Hearing Designation Order, 6 FCC Rcd 4622 (1991); *Calvary Educ. Broad. Network, Inc.*, Hearing Designation Order, 7 FCC Rcd 4037 (1992).

of 1934, as amended, and section 1.80 of the Commission's rules,²⁴ that Mt. Vernon Missionary Baptist Church, is hereby **NOTIFIED** of its **APPARENT LIABILITY FOR FORFEITURE** in the amount of one thousand five hundred dollars (\$1,500) for its apparent willful violation of section 73.3539 of the Commission's rules.²⁵

10. **IT IS FURTHER ORDERED**, pursuant to section 1.80 of the Commission's rules, that, within thirty (30) days of the release date of this *NAL*, Mt. Vernon Missionary Baptist Church, **SHALL PAY** the full amount of the proposed forfeiture or **SHALL FILE** a written statement seeking reduction or cancellation of the proposed forfeiture.

11. Payment of the forfeiture must be made by credit card, ACH (Automated Clearing House) debit from a bank account using the Commission's Fee Filer (the Commission's online payment system),²⁶ or by wire transfer. The Commission no longer accepts forfeiture payments by check or money order. Below are instructions that payors should follow based on the form of payment selected:²⁷

- Payment by wire transfer must be made to ABA Number 021030004, receiving bank TREAS/NYC, and Account Number 27000001. A completed Form 159 must be faxed to the Federal Communications Commission at 202-418-2843 or e-mailed to RROGWireFaxes@fcc.gov on the same business day the wire transfer is initiated. Failure to provide all required information in Form 159 may result in payment not being recognized as having been received. When completing FCC Form 159, enter the Account Number in block number 23A (call sign/other ID), enter the letters "FORF" in block number 24A (payment type code), and enter in block number 11 the FRN(s) captioned above (Payor FRN).²⁸ For additional detail and wire transfer instructions, go to <https://www.fcc.gov/licensing-databases/fees/wire-transfer>.
- Payment by credit card must be made by using the Commission's Fee Filer website at <https://apps.fcc.gov/FeeFiler/login.cfm>. To pay by credit card, log in using the FRN captioned above. If payment must be split across FRNs, complete this process for each FRN. Next, select "Pay bills" on the Fee Filer Menu, and select the bill number associated with the *NAL* Account – the bill number is the *NAL* Account number with the first two digits excluded – and then choose the "Pay by Credit Card" option. Please note that there is a dollar limitation on credit card transactions, which cannot exceed \$24,999.99.
- Payment by ACH must be made by using the Commission's Fee Filer website at <https://apps.fcc.gov/FeeFiler/login.cfm>. To pay by ACH, log in using the FRN captioned above. If payment must be split across FRNs, complete this process for each FRN. Next, select "Pay bills" on the Fee Filer Menu and then select the bill number associated to the *NAL* Account—the bill number is the *NAL* Account number with the first two digits excluded—and choose the "Pay from Bank Account" option. Please contact the appropriate financial institution to confirm the correct Routing Number and the correct account number from which payment will be made and verify with that financial institution that the designated account has authorization to accept ACH transactions.

12. Any request for making full payment over time under an installment plan should be sent to: Revenue and Receivables Operations Group—Financial Operations, Federal Communications

²⁴ 47 U.S.C. § 503(b); 47 CFR § 1.80.

²⁵ 47 CFR § 73.3539.

²⁶ Payments made using the Commission's Fee Filer system do not require the submission of an FCC Form 159.

²⁷ For questions regarding payment procedures, please contact the Financial Operations Group Help Desk by phone at 1-877-480-3201 (option #6), or by e-mail at ARINQUIRIES@fcc.gov.

²⁸ Instructions for completing the form may be obtained at <https://www.fcc.gov/Forms/Form159/159.pdf>.

Commission, 45 L Street, N.E., Washington, DC 20554, or by e-mail, ARINQUIRIES@fcc.gov.²⁹ Questions regarding payment procedures should be directed to the Financial Operations Group Help Desk by phone, 1-877-480-3201 (option #6), or by e-mail at ARINQUIRIES@fcc.gov.

13. Any written response seeking reduction or cancellation of the proposed forfeiture must include a detailed factual statement supported by appropriate documentation and affidavits pursuant to sections 1.16 and 1.80(g)(3) of the Commission's rules.³⁰ The written response must be filed with the Office of the Secretary, Federal Communications Commission, 45 L Street NE, Washington DC 20554, ATTN: Albert Shuldiner, Chief, Audio Division, Media Bureau, and **MUST INCLUDE** the NAL/Acct. No. referenced above. Filings can be sent by commercial overnight courier, or by first-class or overnight U.S. Postal Service mail. All filings must be addressed to the Commission's Secretary, Office of the Secretary, Federal Communications Commission.³¹ A courtesy copy emailed to Alexander.Sanjenis@fcc.gov will assist in processing the response.

- Commercial overnight mail (other than U.S. Postal Service Express Mail and Priority Mail) must be sent to 9050 Junction Drive, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701.
- Postal Service first-class, Express, and Priority mail must be addressed to 45 L Street, NE, Washington, DC 20554.

14. The Commission will not consider reducing or canceling a forfeiture in response to a claim of inability to pay unless the respondent submits: (1) federal tax returns for the most recent three-year period; (2) financial statements prepared according to generally accepted accounting practices (GAAP); or (3) some other reliable and objective documentation that accurately reflects the respondent's current financial status. Any claim of inability to pay must specifically identify the basis for the claim by reference to the financial documentation submitted. Inability to pay, however, is only one of several factors that the Commission will consider in determining the appropriate forfeiture, and we have discretion to not reduce or cancel the forfeiture if other prongs of section 503(b)(2)(E) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, support that result.³²

15. **IT IS FURTHER ORDERED**, that copies of this *NAL* shall be sent by First Class and Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested, to Mt. Vernon Missionary Baptist Church, c/o Barbara Culberson, PO Box 371, Noxapater, MS 39346.

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

Albert Shuldiner
Chief, Audio Division
Media Bureau

²⁹ See 47 CFR § 1.1914.

³⁰ 47 CFR §§ 1.16 and 1.80(g)(3).

³¹ Effective March 19, 2020, and until further notice, the Commission no longer accepts any hand or messenger delivered filings. This is a temporary measure taken to help protect the health and safety of individuals, and to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19. See *FCC Announces Closure of FCC Headquarters Open Window and Change in Hand-Delivery Filing*, Public Notice, 35 FCC Rcd 2788 (2020).

³² See 47 U.S.C. 503(b)(2)(E); *Adrian Abramovich*, Forfeiture Order, 33 FCC Rcd 4663, 4678-79, paras. 44-45 (2018).